

**Department for Work and Pensions**

**Research Report No 326**

# **Maximising the role of outreach in client engagement**

**Sara Dewson, Sara Davis and Jo Casebourne**

A report of research carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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# Summary

## Aims of the research

This report presents the findings from the research into 'Maximising the Role of Outreach in Client Engagement' for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Outreach has been used as a mechanism to deliver elements of welfare-to-work services in local community settings and this research set out to determine what makes for effective outreach provision, and conversely, to look at the factors that serve to inhibit successful outreach services.

## Method of approach

This research had two main strands:

- a literature review; and
- a series of interviews with policy personnel, local stakeholders and outreach project managers.

The literature review has drawn on evidence from the UK, US and international sources while the interviews have been undertaken with individuals who have experience of managing or running outreach projects (largely) in the context of UK welfare-to-work services.

## Key findings

### **Defining outreach**

'Outreach' is a term that is often used but rarely defined. It applies to many policy fields, including education and health services, and essentially entails services being taken out from their normative and mainstream institutional settings and providing those services in local community settings. In the welfare-to-work arena, outreach services are used to:

- engage customers; and
- deliver welfare-to-work services in local settings and environments.

Outreach services may also be defined as those that draw on partnerships and networks with other service providers to deliver and promote welfare-to-work services in local communities.

Outreach services can be employed to raise the profile of (more mainstream) services and inform potential customers of the provision and help that is available to them. Outreach services can also be used to reach and engage specific customer groups and those who do not tend to use mainstream services, ie those people who are 'harder-to-reach'. Outreach provision can then be used as a means to deliver welfare-to-work services to these customers, away from mainstream settings and in more informal and relaxed surroundings.

### **Scope of outreach**

Outreach activities aimed at engaging new customers include: leaflets and newsletters; billboard and bus advertising; stalls and displays in local venues (eg libraries, community centres, markets etc.); marketing products and 'goodies'; open days; and sponsored events. These products and events are used to maintain the profile of services and to encourage customers to take up (outreach) provision.

The type of services provided on an outreach basis include: regular one-to-one meetings with key workers or personal advisers; advice on in-work benefits and tax credits; overcoming barriers to work; referrals to other agencies; help with jobsearch and CV preparation; helping with the costs of childcare and transport; and ongoing, in-work support. Outreach provision is able to offer a full advisory service to customers in similar ways to Jobcentre Plus, the main differences being:

- services are provided closer to home;
- they are usually voluntary and customers are not mandated to participate and encounter no sanctions if they opt not to do so;
- outreach providers may be different to mainstream (Jobcentre Plus) providers.

Outreach may be delivered in different ways. They may be delivered in a specific, separate site (the satellite model), for example, a high street shop or they may use another organisation's premises (the peripatetic model), such as a room in a community centre. Outreach staff may go out into the community and engage with customers outside any organisational settings (the detached outreach model), for example, in shopping centres or mosques, or they may visit people in their own homes (the domicillary model).

### **Providers of outreach**

Outreach services are provided by many different organisations, and the key players in welfare-to-work outreach service provision are Jobcentre Plus and their contractors,

local authorities and other community organisations. Some providers believe it is important to distance themselves from Jobcentre Plus and statutory provision to overcome negative perceptions and suspicions of these central agencies and so outreach services are often marketed quite separately from the mainstream. What is key to outreach provision though, regardless of the agency or organisation providing it, and on which there is much consensus, is the attributes and skills of outreach workers. Outreach staff need to:

- be enthusiastic, friendly and outgoing;
- have a passion for the job;
- have empathy towards the customer group(s);
- share some characteristics with the customer group, eg age, gender, ethnic group, community background;
- have good communication and organisational skills;
- be flexible and prepared to work out of hours.

Qualifications are much less important than the personal characteristics, attitudes and personalities of outreach workers. If people do not want to do outreach work, they will not make good outreach workers. In addition, effective outreach staff need to have a clear understanding of the local labour market, benefits and tax credits etc. to really help people back into employment.

### **Assessing outreach**

Assessing the outcomes from outreach is difficult. Outcomes from outreach take longer to achieve as customers are harder-to-reach and thus, by definition, usually harder-to-help. These customers are normally disengaged from mainstream services and require some time and investment to build trust and confidence in the service. Once engaged, customers often require lengthy interventions to overcome barriers to work and consequently, quick wins from outreach per se are rare.

Outreach services are often peripheral activities and provision is patchy. This makes arriving at any reliable aggregate measure of success from outreach impossible to calculate. However, evidence from the literature review and from project managers and stakeholders, suggests that outreach is effective at attracting non-traditional customers into welfare-to-work services. Many projects assert that they are achieving job outcomes for these harder-to-help customers over and above their targets. Moreover, these customers are making gains in soft outcomes all the time, for example, improving their confidence and motivation.

The main reasons why outreach services are effective is that they are provided in more informal circumstances and settings which encourage and inspire greater participation. Moreover, the provision is delivered in 'flexible and friendly' ways, not least because participation is usually voluntary and provision is less stringently geared to meeting targets. Outreach staff are able to work for longer with

customers to overcome barriers and to achieve quality and sustainable outcomes. Importantly, services that are delivered in the community are perceived, importantly, to be provided by and for the community.

Outreach services may be negatively affected or constrained if: they lack clear goals; lack support from mainstream organisations; lack capacity and/or funds to deliver; face (overly burdensome) outcome-related funding pressures which encourage 'creaming'; and experience difficulties working in partnership with other (local) agencies.

## Conclusions

In the current policy climate, outreach services certainly seem to have a role in customer engagement, in the 'local areas' agenda, and in promoting greater partnership working within local communities. The main conclusions coming from this study are that outreach services can be, and indeed seem to be, effective. More effort is required though to understand more fully, and systematically, who does make use of outreach services and what their outcomes from this type of intervention are. Some robust assessment of the additionality of outreach services and their complementarity to mainstream provision may then be possible.

# 1 Introduction

This report presents the findings from the research study into 'Maximising the Role of Outreach in Client Engagement'. This research was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2005, and was undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES).

## 1.1 Aims and objectives

The aim of the research is to enable DWP to enhance its strategic knowledge base regarding where and how the scope of outreach should be developed in order to effectively implement new initiatives. The specific objectives of the research were to:

- identify projects and pilots that have used outreach in client engagement;
- review existing evidence and evaluation findings in order to identify the key factors that lead to successful outreach provision; and
- identify the key inhibitors of successful outreach provision.

This report presents the findings from all stages of the research project and addresses the key questions raised above.

## 1.2 Methodological approach

The research methodology for this study had two main elements:

- a literature review; and
- a series of specialist interviews.

### 1.2.1 Literature review

This consisted of a desk-based review of published and 'grey' literature. This review aimed to examine the literature on specific welfare-to-work outreach programmes and/or services that had elements of outreach contained within them, in order to find evidence of effective and ineffective 'outreach'. On further exploration,

however, much of the literature on outreach and outreach services was found to relate to other areas of policy, for example, education, drug rehabilitation, homelessness and mental health services. In addition to examining literature about outreach and employment, the review has, therefore, assessed literature from other policy arenas to identify common themes and cross-cutting issues that are also pertinent to the provision of outreach services in the welfare-to-work field. The desk-research phase was also used to identify welfare-to-work type projects and pilots that have used outreach in client engagement that could go through to the second stage of the project.

The literature review has drawn mainly on UK sources, but has also examined literature from overseas, in particular, the USA, Australia and Canada. The literature has been gathered through extensive searches of a number of databases using a variety of key words and sets of key search terms (see Table 1.1 for a summary of the search conducted and the hits generated). Because the subject of outreach in relation to welfare-to-work policy has not been subject to any systematic review in the past, and indeed because it is a term that, although it has common parlance, is ill-defined, the literature review was required to be conducted using a broad number of search terms, eg outreach and job search, outreach and social inclusion, outreach and employment, community delivery and employment etc. A significant number of reports and articles resulted from the search, which were sorted into those of primary relevance and those with secondary or weaker relevance to the study. The latter sources of literature (unfortunately) made up the bulk of all references. The References section contains all the major sources of literature that were analysed in detail for this research.

**Table 1.1 Hits/articles generated by search terms and databases used**

Search terms	Database used					
	ISI Web of Knowledge	Econlit	IBBS International Bibliography of Social Science	Google Scholar	Blackwell Synergy	EBSCO Host-Business Source Premier
Outreach and job search				7,410	85	
Outreach and employment-related	1	13	1	176		
Outreach and job centre				5,300		
Outreach and employment	2	2	1	12,100		
Outreach and welfare to work		13		9,040		2
Outreach and welfare to work, UK				3,840		

Continued

**Table 1.1 Continued**

Search terms	Database used					
	ISI Web of Knowledge	Econlit	IBBS International Bibliography of Social Science	Google Scholar	Blackwell Synergy	EBSCO Host-Business Source Premier
Outreach and information, advice and guidance services			7	5,790		
Outreach and social inclusion				7,830		
Outreach Employment Programmes UK				2,760		
Outreach and Engagement		8	2	6,240		
Outreach employment programs				4,150		
Programme Delivery and Employment				14,800		
Community Delivery and Employment				27,400		
Local Programme Delivery and Work				28,900		
Careers and Outreach				5,280		
Adult Learning and Outreach				7530		
Review of Programme Delivery and Employment				12,500		
Summary of Programme Delivery and Employment				10,200		

Source: IES, 2005.

Relevant DWP research reports, particularly those evaluating welfare-to-work programmes, were also searched for the word 'outreach', to ensure that any information on outreach gained in broader welfare-to-work evaluations was gathered. Leads were also followed up from bibliographies at the end of references, and from literature mentioned in the follow-up stakeholder interviews.

### 1.2.2 Specialist interviews

A round of face-to-face and telephone interviews were undertaken with key policy personnel and project or pilot staff themselves who had hands-on experience of using outreach to deliver key services. These discussions included interviews with representatives of:

- the DWP;
- the Inland Revenue;

- New Deal for Communities;
- Jobcentre Plus offices;
- Working Neighbourhoods Pilot;
- Action Teams;
- local authorities, including Neighbourhood Renewal teams;
- NIACE;
- learning and training providers;
- outreach projects and providers;
- other projects, eg welfare-to-work training programmes.

Most of the project managers consulted were directly relevant to the research and were providing (or had provided) welfare-to-work services whilst others had different or much broader remits. The aim was to gather a variety of views on issues concerning:

- definitions of outreach;
- rationale for using outreach;
- target groups for outreach;
- the scope of outreach;
- location of outreach services;
- provision of outreach services;
- providers of outreach services;
- constraints faced in outreach; and
- the effectiveness of outreach.

In total, 27 interviews were carried out with stakeholders and project managers between July to September 2005: what was instructive was the degree to which opinions converged on the issues listed above. Some examples of the projects discussed are given in Appendix A.

### 1.3 Structure of the report

Neither the literature review nor the specialist interviews were undertaken as part of a systematic review. Rather, the study was exploratory and aimed to understand more fully the role and place of outreach services in welfare-to-work delivery. However, the report provides examples of good (and not so good) outreach practices, based on the experiences of those who fund and deliver these types of services, and evidence from those who have evaluated them.

This report presents a synthesis of the findings from the literature review and the interviews with stakeholders and project managers and is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 discusses the definitions of outreach to arrive at an appropriate means to understand outreach with regard to welfare-to-work policies. In so doing, the chapter also looks at the rationale for using outreach as a means to deliver these types of policies;
- Chapter 3 describes the scope of welfare-to-work outreach services and identifies the main outreach activities and models of delivery;
- Chapter 4 looks at the providers of outreach services and discusses, in some detail the skills required by outreach staff;
- Chapter 5 offers an assessment of the effectiveness of outreach services and seeks firstly for evidence of hard outcomes. The chapter then moves on to identify the factors that can facilitate or inhibit effective welfare-to-work outreach services;
- Chapter 6 discusses the main conclusions coming from the research and identifies key learning points for welfare-to-work policy.



## 2 Defining outreach

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at how outreach can be defined and, as part of this, identifies the main reasons or rationale for using outreach. These two issues are inextricably linked and it seems that the definition of outreach is often shaped by the type of activity that is being undertaken. As McGivney (2000a) points out:

*'the reasons for doing outreach usually determine understandings of it.'*

### 2.2 Definitions of outreach

Outreach is a term that lacks any one clear definition and is often used but rarely explained.

*'It tends to be used rather loosely by practitioners and its meaning appears to be taken for granted in much of the literature.'*

(McGivney, 2000a)

By way of an example, the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP's) research report on 'Ethnic Minority Outreach: An evaluation' (DWP, 2005) offered no definition(s) of outreach, although the study is dedicated to evaluating such approaches. Similarly, a Department for Education and Employment report on outreach demonstration projects gave no initial definitions (Watson and Tyers, 1998). Importantly, McGivney (2000a) also points out that outreach, as a term, is often not used at all in the literature. Rather, reports and other documentation often describe outreach activities as 'engagement with local actors, networks and cultures', 'community development' or 'social inclusion'. Such diffuse terms make searching for relevant literature particularly problematic.

The literature review reflected the confusion and lack of clarity about what is meant by the term 'outreach'. The most comprehensive overview of the origins of outreach and its use and interpretation come from McGivney's examination of outreach in the field of adult learning:

*'There is no single and universally accepted definition of 'outreach'. Most people interpret it as a process that involves going out from a specific organisation or centre to work in other locations with sets of people who typically do not or cannot avail themselves of the services of that centre. Whilst the central connotation of outreach is to physically **go** outside the institution (a staff activity), a number of other meanings have accrued to the word: **activities to make people in different locations or groups aware of what an organisation or centre can offer** (a marketing or recruitment strategy); **provision of learning programmes in informal community locations** (a delivery mechanism); **liaison and contact with other organisations or particular sets of people** (a networking process); **working in particular ways** with people outside the main centre or institution (a method or approach), as well as any number of other meanings.'*

(McGivney 2000a, p11. Emphasis is author's own)

Thus, there is the emphasis on taking something (eg a service of some sort) out of a central (or institutional) setting and doing that something in different, usually more local, settings. The views of stakeholders and project managers, gathered during the interview phase of the research, concurred with this emphasis:

*'Where a service is prepared to work outside the normal environment and in the community to work with those who are isolated from services.'*

(Learning provider)

*'Taking a service to where people are, in an environment they can relate to. Some people are not just physically but also psychologically distanced from mainstream services.'*

(Project manager)

*'Outreach is a mechanism for informing local people of the opportunities in their local community.'*

(Project manager)

*'Outreach is a way of 'engaging' with all the people in one community, irrespective of particular characteristics.'*

(Project manager)

*'It's reaching out to people who you wouldn't otherwise be able to recruit'*

(Project manager)

*'Reaching out to communities and bringing awareness to them that organisations or people or possibilities are there to help them and whatever they say or wish to say or not say will be confidential.'*

(Project manager)

However, McGivney (2000a) also stresses the shortcomings of defining outreach solely, and in any broadbrush way, as activities or services that are delivered 'off-site', that is, away from mainstream organisations. She cites examples whereby learning that is delivered using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), i.e. virtually and away from mainstream learning providers, could be classed as outreach using this definition, or where Higher Education (HE) courses are delivered in further education colleges. In this example, the courses are still delivered in a central institutional setting and there is no real sense that the service or provision has been taken out to customers or clients. Another example would be where services that are contracted out from mainstream public services are defined as outreach services. Welfare-to-work programmes in the US are decentralised, locally designed, often delivered by community and private organisations, and are called 'outreach' services. However, these services are delivered in not dissimilar ways to the mainstream Jobcentre Plus network: although the services are delivered by different providers, they are not necessarily delivered in close proximity to the customer group. Thus, with regard to US welfare-to-work literature, there is much discussion of outreach services when, in fact, the content relates to (essentially) services that have been contracted-out: it is for this reason that much of the US literature was excluded from this review.

Thus, for the purposes of this study, with its emphasis on outreach and client engagement, but also because there is no intention to constrain the research unduly by adopting strict definitional criteria, outreach has been determined as a means of providing a service that involves taking the service out and away from its usual (central or) institutional setting and providing it in other locations and environmental settings.

In this report, the 'service' may include:

- a marketing or recruitment activity, eg attracting, informing and engaging customers on an outreach basis to make them aware of welfare-to-work services;
- welfare-to-work services that are delivered out in local community settings (and thus, different to the prevailing institutional norms);
- a networking process whereby service providers work in partnership with other local stakeholders to promote and deliver welfare-to-work services to people in local communities.

The definition of outreach given here is not fixed and final, and nor are the types of outreach services mutually exclusive: welfare-to-work services may be marketed and provided using outreach, and all of this may be undertaken within the context of local partnership (net)working.

## 2.3 Rationale for outreach

This section explores the rationale for using outreach, in its many forms, ie as a marketing and engagement strategy, a delivery mechanism, or as a networking process. Essentially, the research has sought to understand why and when organisations use outreach in order to illustrate the situations in which such a mode of working may be appropriate. However, as discussed already, the reasons for using outreach often determine how it is defined.

During the interview phase of the research, stakeholders and project providers cited three main rationales for using outreach:

- **To raise the profile/knowledge of their services.**

Some stakeholders and project managers mentioned that they use outreach to raise awareness of their organisation and the opportunities and services available to customers.

*'We have to go out and advertise as there are lots of different providers, lots of different organisations.'*

(Project Manager)

- **To reach and engage particular customers and groups who do not readily use mainstream services.**

Nearly all stakeholders and project managers reported that outreach was used to attract new customer groups. Many customers targeted by outreach do not use mainstream services, perhaps because they are ineligible for benefits and, thus, do not come into contact with official services, or because they are suspicious and intimidated by mainstream services, eg they do not like the idea of 'officialdom' or, in the case of learning, going back into a classroom environment. In these examples, people prefer to talk and/or visit providers and services that are based in less threatening and easier-to-reach environments.

*'Outreach is used to reach people who would normally be put off from accessing training like BME groups or those with chaotic lifestyles, or who are put off mainstream services or had bad experiences at school.'*

(Learning provider)

- **To deliver services in the local community.**

Stakeholders and project managers cited that their rationale for using outreach was to deliver services out in the local community, especially in communities where there was poor service provision and where people had difficulties in accessing advice, support and/or training.

The literature also stressed the importance of outreach as a way to actually deliver services in the local community, particularly in deprived communities and those that are geographically isolated. The Jobs for All report (DfEE, 1999) argued that the key

was to bring services to the people rather than to make the people go to the services, which in many cases and areas was not working. Recent policy, for example, the Working Neighbourhoods Pilots and the New Deal for Communities are examples of how government is trying out more local approaches to service delivery. Services can be delivered (perhaps in partnership) by organisations working in the community, ie via outreach, and by stationing (or outsourcing) staff in the deprived neighbourhoods. A key rationale for the Action Team for Jobs initiative was to improve the accessibility and take-up of employment services by delivering services through outreach in areas with particular problems of labour market disadvantage (Ecotec, 2002). McGivney (2000) outlines how outreach can be used to actually deliver services in the local community, by taking learning opportunities to groups and individuals who are unable to access provision for reasons such as family responsibilities, difficulties with costs and transport, age, disability or poor health and to those who are resistant because of former educational experiences, fear or apprehension. She also argues that outreach can be used to develop new methods of educational delivery that overcome problems related to time, distance and mobility, and to develop new learning programmes that respond to expressed interests and needs. These arguments are also relevant to the welfare-to-work agenda where there are clear parallels.

In a paper supporting more **local** approaches to active labour market policies in order to overcome long-term unemployment (and by association inactivity), Campbell (2000) argued for more extensive outreach to get vacancies and job-broking services to those who need them most. He believed that proximity to the target groups was important, as was designing local provision and activities to meet the needs of individuals and customer groups. He argued that outreach was necessary to connect to the concerns of, and increase participation by, the most disadvantaged groups, and that activities should be delivered as close to the groups as possible, both in geographical terms and in terms of those who know them best (see Chapter 4 on providers of outreach). In the field of adult learning, McGivney (2002) describes how outreach activities are necessary to raise awareness of available learning opportunities among the groups who traditionally do not participate in organised learning, and to identify communities or groups who have not been reached and who may have unmet learning interests or needs. Such rationales for using outreach can be applied equally to the welfare-to-work agenda.

### **2.3.1 Reaching target groups**

Most of the literature on outreach highlights the need to identify the main target or customer groups, and most of these, in relation to welfare-to-work and related services, tended to be those people who do not readily take-up mainstream services. In addition, these people often shared characteristics that led to their categorisation as 'harder-to-help' or 'harder-to-reach' customers. A number of target groups were cited in the literature and they offer useful insights into how outreach might be more widely used with welfare-to-work customers. The main target groups included:

- refugees, asylum seekers and migrants;

- ethnic minorities;
- rough sleepers and other groups of homeless people;
- people with mental health and substance misuse problems;
- residents of rural communities.

Outreach has been used to encourage people within these target groups to engage with services; that is, it has performed a marketing and recruitment function to get them hooked into mainstream provision and services. However, outreach has also gone beyond engagement for many of these groups, by providing specialist information and advice, fitting delivery of services into their sometimes chaotic lifestyles, bringing multiple agencies together to address issues and problems, and taking services out to isolated areas. Thus, outreach has allowed a greater targeting of services towards needs, as well as targeting services towards particular customer groups. Some of the examples discussed in the literature were:

- An outreach programme where the target customers were refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in a particular area of London (Cliff, 2000). The aim of this outreach programme was to improve their employability skills and to help them find work. Outreach was crucial in this example as it helped to reach customers who were not necessarily entitled to benefits, and therefore, did not necessarily use the mainstream services. It also enabled specialist advice and help with language and cultural issues to be provided, which mainstream services are not always best equipped to provide.
- An outreach engagement project that increased benefit take-up amongst older black and minority ethnic people (Bernard *et al.*, 2003). Outreach and localised face-to-face provision were found to be central to increasing benefit take-up amongst this target group.
- An outreach project for rough sleepers and other groups of homeless people (Squirrell, 2001). The aim of this outreach programme was to engage the customer group and provide holistic models of employment-focused provision. The project sought to discover effective new ways to attract and meet the guidance and vocational development needs of a group of adults traditionally labelled as hard-to-reach by mainstream services. These adults have chaotic lifestyles that would be hard to manage under mainstream provision.
- An outreach project working with people with mental health and substance misuse problems. Mitchell *et al.* (2002) evaluated an employment development project that used outreach to engage young people who presented mental health and substance misuse problems, who are often excluded from mainstream services, and whose very complex needs require a flexible, multi-agency approach.
- Outreach events were used in the early stages of the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) in the UK to raise awareness, market, and encourage lone parents to join

the mainstream programme (Evans *et al.*, 2002) and the Innovative Pilots for lone parents, which ran between spring 1999 and 2001, often used outreach as a mechanism to reach lone parents who had not responded to existing NDLP approaches.

- The Big Bus project (renewal.net) used outreach in geographically isolated communities, targeting the most socially excluded groups and residents of the rural communities of Ayrshire. The target groups included people throughout Ayrshire in areas disadvantaged in labour market terms, the long-term unemployed, jobseekers with low basic skills, and lone parents.

Stakeholders and project managers who took part in the specialist interviews for this research also noted that outreach services often had multiple customer types. In particular, projects that were funded and/or managed by Jobcentre Plus or local councils were often more focused on specific geographical areas or wards rather than a specific customer group. The key defining feature of these areas was social and economic deprivation and some of the main customers amongst these projects, in addition to those listed already, included:

- people with health problems and/or disabilities (physical or learning);
- young disaffected people;
- people with few or no formal qualifications;
- people whose first language is not English;
- people on low incomes;
- people in geographically isolated areas;
- older men;
- lone parents;
- long-term unemployed people;
- ex-offenders.

The Jobs for All report (DfEE, 1999) stated that more needed to be done to reach people who slipped through the net of active labour market programmes and/or who chose not to join the labour market, and the current policy shift in emphasis towards more inactive client groups supports the need to engage non-traditional jobseekers. Indeed, a key rationale for Action Teams for Jobs was that workless individuals, and not just those who were registered as unemployed, who were not accessing mainstream job-seeking and job-broking services on a regular basis, would be more willing to access them on a voluntary, informal basis in non-threatening community-based settings, i.e on an outreach basis. Whilst it is true that all benefit customers will have more regular contact with officials as Jobcentre Plus rolls out more fully, it does not necessarily follow that these customers will be actively seeking work, nor that their engagement with Jobcentre Plus will facilitate

such a shift in aspiration. Outreach, on the other hand, may be used to engage with customers (possibly over the long-term) in their own environment to bring about changes in activity or intent, and to broaden the horizons of the (seemingly) hardest-to-help and hardest-to-reach.

## 3 Scope of outreach

This chapter looks in more detail at the services that are provided via outreach and also examines how and where outreach is provided, i.e the location of these services. As discussed in the earlier chapters, some outreach initiatives are focused on raising awareness, marketing, and signposting services to potential customers; others go further and aim to engage clients with services, while others go further still and actually deliver services through outreach provision. Many outreach providers aim to, and do, provide all of these activities.

### 3.1 Outreach activities

#### 3.1.1 Marketing and engagement

A number of examples were given by stakeholders and project managers to illustrate how they marketed and signposted their services (which may or may not subsequently be provided using outreach methods). Some of these marketing and signposting activities included:

- leaflet drops and newsletters giving information on the services available;
- advertising (incorporating billboard advertising), advertisements on buses, local papers, radio etc.;
- stalls and displays in local venues, eg markets, community centres, libraries, GP premises/medical centres etc., either on a one-off basis or with regular slots or surgeries;
- marketing products and 'goodies', for example, balloons, mugs, soft toys, pens, etc.;
- organised open days and other sponsored events, eg funding after-school clubs;
- presence at employment fairs.

Although the aim of these types of activities is to engage people and to encourage them to take up services, it is often the starting point for relationship building. With the exception of leaflet drops, advertisements and the like, most marketing and

engagement activities involve some sort of personal contact between (potential) customers and groups and outreach workers, but importantly, outside of any mainstream service environment, and usually on customers' 'home' ground or familiar territory. This sort of contact is seen as a crucial element of outreach and far more effective than leaflets and advertising in attracting customers, and gaining their long-term interest and commitment. Having said this, marketing materials and related activities serve to maintain the profile of outreach services, and are a necessary part of the 'whole'.

It is often the case that different marketing and engagement mechanisms or a combination of outreach methods have been tried by providers in order to find the approach that is most successful. Project managers welcomed the flexibility afforded by outreach to change their engagement methods, as necessary, in order to attract key customer groups.

### **3.1.2 Service provision**

The literature review gave examples of many of the services delivered through outreach, and this was backed up by the findings from interviews with stakeholders and project managers. The main examples of outreach service provision, as they relate to the welfare-to-work agenda, are:

- information, advice and guidance on welfare-to-work programmes, jobsearch and job-broking services, and related learning opportunities;
- advice on in-work benefits and tax credits;
- advice on, or linking up with, other relevant services, eg housing, social services, specialist drug and alcohol teams, mental health team, debt counselling, etc.;
- training in vocational skills, IT, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and basic skills, etc.;
- lifeskills training including soft skills training, eg confidence building, life coaching etc., and other non-work related courses, for example, parenting courses;
- help with jobsearch, CV preparation, job broking;
- mentoring and one-to-one help with advisers, including Jobcentre Plus personal advisers;
- arranging work placements;
- providing in-work support;
- funding and/or linking up with other services, such as after-school clubs and holiday playschemes;
- providing help with childcare costs and travel costs to access learning courses or go to job interviews;
- financial help to purchase tools, work clothes, and to tax or MOT work vehicles.

In relation to the welfare-to-work agenda then, outreach services are often typified by one-to-one support to overcome barriers to work, to help with jobsearch techniques and to offer job-broking services. Training courses were also offered to engage people in learning with the aim of improving immediate skills, for example, in IT, but also to encourage people towards longer-term educational programmes and increased social inclusion. Essentially, outreach provision is, in many cases, able to offer a full personal adviser service to customers in similar ways to Jobcentre Plus, the main differences being:

- the location of the service (closer to customers);
- the (usually) voluntary nature of the service (with a commensurate lack of mandation and sanctions); and
- (possibly) the actual provider of the service (see Chapter 4 on providers of outreach).

Stakeholders and project managers stressed the importance of being able to provide flexible and tailored support for each individual and felt that an outreach approach allowed them to do so. Interviewees reported that outreach offered greater flexibility than mainstream Jobcentre Plus provision: they were able to provide or support activities that would be impossible under normal circumstances, such as after-school clubs, support groups, and soft skills training. Moreover, all of these activities were offered in a friendly, local environment.

Some examples of outreach service provision from the literature include:

- an outreach project for refugees and migrants in London which offered information and advice on requalification and retraining routes, used Single Regeneration Budget funding to help retrain local refugee doctors and nurses, provided English courses, careers advice, and help with CV's and application forms (Cliff, 2000);
- a homeless agency developed a mentoring programme offering in-depth, longer-term and holistic guidance to customers on an as-needed basis. This provision was delivered by professional mentors with specialist backgrounds in vocational guidance, homelessness, mental health and benefits (Squirrel, 2001);
- an outreach peer (or buddy) mentoring programme in which mentors and mentees shared a background of homelessness and related issues. The mentors had, themselves, moved from homelessness into employment or training and settled living, and were, therefore, able to help mentees overcome similar hurdles to make the transition to work and independent living (Squirrel, 2001).

Four of the key defining features of outreach provision, which came up in the literature review and were raised by stakeholders and project managers were:

- outreach offers or markets a wide range of services;
- services are delivered in an holistic way;

- there is personalised customer/client attention; and
- less emphasis on (job) outcomes.

This last point is important and one that came through repeatedly during the interviews with stakeholders and project managers. Whilst outreach staff (in the welfare-to-work area) are (rightly) focused on employment outcomes, and outreach services are usually funded on an outcome-related basis, the job targets seem to be less stringent than those in mainstream Jobcentre Plus offices. This is welcomed by project managers as staff can then work with customers to build trust and overcome barriers to work, and can do so over the longer-term. This approach is often seen to secure better quality outcomes with (harder-to-help) customers not only moving into permanent jobs but being able to sustain them.

The provision of an holistic service, delivered in a non-threatening way with no element of compulsion, is perceived to be a hugely important element of outreach provision. Another feature of outreach provision is the flexibility it affords. Without stringent targets, and with a remit of meeting local needs in the most appropriate way, there is a 'try it and see' and 'if it's broke, fix it' approach.

### 3.2 Outreach delivery

Clearly, the type of outreach service that is being provided largely dictates how and where the service is provided. McGivney (2000) provides a typology of outreach provision, specifically in the context of educational activities, but which has wider replicability for welfare-to-work services. She notes that outreach services can take a number of different forms with most falling into one or more of the following categories:

- the satellite model: establishing stand alone, separate outreach centres for delivering services in community locations;
- the peripatetic model: delivering services in other organisational settings such as hostels, community centres, GP surgeries, housing offices, etc.;
- the detached outreach model: contacting people outside of agency or organisational settings, for example, in streets, shopping centres, pubs, at school gates, etc.;
- the domicillary outreach model: visiting people in their own homes.

In the main, the literature described the most common forms of outreach as the satellite model, whereby services are delivered either from a fixed and separate location within the local targeted community; the detached outreach model, for example, taking mobile units out into the community, eg outreach buses, or going out to mosques, coffee shops, markets, etc.; and the peripatetic model, involving delivering services from within other organisations such as community centres, youth clubs or schools.

During the interviews with stakeholders and project managers, it became clear that many projects used a combination of delivery models depending on what service was to be delivered and their experience of what worked and what did not. For example, when outreach was used as a means to market services and/or engage (potential) customers, the detached outreach model, and in some instances, the domicillary model, was used. Where outreach was being used for service delivery purposes, such as the provision of job-broking services, the satellite and peripatetic models were most often used.

### 3.2.1 The satellite model

In terms of the satellite model, Cliff (2000), in his work on refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, described how the outreach service was based at a fixed point where clients could go for a small amount of provision, whilst others were then referred on to other providers/partners in the community. Watt (1998) described how creating a central point, such as a one-stop-shop, in a community or town for the provision of guidance and counselling in relation to education, training and labour market opportunities, was an effective approach to service delivery. Yeandle and Pearson (2001) found that community-based delivery of training proved to be essential for lone parents in rural and sparsely populated areas with poor public transport links. Lone parents appreciated the opportunity to access training in local venues, and some participants said they would not have joined the programme had they needed to travel longer distances to access it. The evaluation of Action Teams (Ecotec, 2002) found that some teams were based in community centres, while others used mobile facilities to reach dispersed communities or those with poor transport links.

Some of the outreach projects involved in the interview phase of this research were located in fixed sites in target areas that were both central and easy to get to. In many cases, these had high street locations which maintained a constant presence amongst the resident population. This was felt to bring great rewards in terms of service profile, and to really help to embed the services, and importantly, staff in the local community.

*'Outreach needs to be in the heart of the community.'*

(New Deal for Communities representative)

*'People are not likely to visit somewhere that is out of their area whether it's a mile away or four miles away. You have to go to them.'*

(Project manager)

*'The location is of paramount importance for attracting unsolicited business.'*

(Project manager)

### 3.2.2 The peripatetic and detached outreach models

In terms of the peripatetic and detached outreach models, Barnes *et al.* (2005) describe how some of the most effective forms of outreach for marketing and engagement purposes, ie outreach that is targeted towards those who are not already using services, are those which involve meeting people as they go about their ordinary activities. In this way, outreach workers visit community centres, temples and mosques, for example, in order to raise the profile of available services. In Barnes' example of working with people from ethnic minorities, this type of detached outreach required outreach staff to have an intimate knowledge of the area, the local community and cultures. Less formal outreach 'sites' such as coffee shops frequented by Kurdish and Turkish men, and markets popular with Asian women, also proved to be effective ways of engaging people, as did door-knocking. The Jobs for All report also states that taking information about jobs and training into local communities through youth clubs, local interest groups, church and faith groups, and through engaging local schools to provide support and facilities, has proved to be successful.

In relation to peripatetic models of outreach, stakeholders and project managers reported that they have conducted sessional outreach or regular surgeries in places such as health centres, libraries, community centres, working men's clubs, shopping centres, schools, colleges, and nurseries. In this way, they come into contact with people who do not necessarily routinely access Jobcentre Plus services, but who may have specific needs. Holding regular sessions at the same time each day or week is important, as relationships can form over time with potential customers, and trust can build slowly.

One advantage of working through other organisations and being co-located with partners, as in the peripatetic model, is the ease of making cross-referrals. Several project managers had received referrals from host organisations, and equally had been able to refer customers on to other partners for additional help or support. In addition, co-locating with other organisations often alleviated concerns about staff security, and health and safety issues. Co-location is not without its problems though and a couple of project managers mentioned during the interviews that they have experienced problems arranging sessional outreach. Some partners did not always understand the aims of the outreach service and were worried that their customers might be 'poached'. This point highlights the importance of building good relationships with partners so that a clear appreciation of roles and aims is achieved.

PECAN, who provide training and other services to long-term unemployed people, usually living in deprived estates in London, use door-knocking in order to reach and engage people who are not claiming benefits and who are not in touch with organisations who might help them find work (Jobs for All, 1999). Many projects taking part in the interviews had tried door-knocking to engage potential customers, however, stakeholders and project managers mentioned that there were some health and safety concerns for outreach workers engaged in this activity. In these

instances, staff usually went out in pairs and always carried personal alarms. On a similar note, it was important for health and safety reasons that satellite units did not open if staff numbers fell below a certain level.

Several projects highlighted in the literature but also some managers taking part in the interviews, used mobile units to promote, engage and provide services. An example of this includes: the BIG Bus Project (Renewal.net) which has brought training to communities and groups in Ayrshire and who have no other means of accessing such facilities; Action Teams have used similar approaches where populations were scattered and public transport links were poor (Ecotec, 2002). In Glasgow, Yeandle and Pearson (2001) also found that delivering training from a mobile unit in local communities was an effective method of service provision.

### 3.3 Location of outreach

Most stakeholders and project managers stressed the importance of researching local areas well before deciding where to locate any sort of outreach service. If the location of outreach was wrong, the service would most likely fail. Clearly, peripatetic outreach is more flexible, and if it proved not to be so successful, it was easy to change the location of the service. However, for fixed satellite outreach provision, locational mistakes are much more of a problem. Stakeholders and project managers felt that in order for welfare-to-work outreach services to be effective, they need to be located:

- close to where target customers and groups live and congregate;
- close to where (potential) customers spend time; and
- in an environment with which people are familiar and comfortable.

The literature shows the importance of locating (outreach) services somewhere where target groups will feel comfortable, and to ensure that premises are welcoming, attractive and unthreatening. McGivney (2000b) cites how many people, especially those from low-income groups who live in disadvantaged areas, are extremely hesitant about leaving their 'comfort zones' and may find non-familiar environments threatening. Provision that is a mile away may be out of reach in terms of transport for some customer groups, but also psychologically and culturally out of reach for many others. Venues need to be open, welcoming and informal, and if premises are seen as the preserve of particular groups, for example, particular social or ethnic groups, or gender, they may not attract people who do not have those characteristics.

An example of an outreach service being deliberately located in an inner city area with high unemployment, high migration and a high ethnic minority population, was the Jobshop in Hyson Green, Nottingham, run by the then Employment Service (Jobs for All, 1999). Part of its success was its location, which was convenient and non-threatening, and considerable effort had been made to ensure that the office was attractive and that it fitted into the local environment, thus increasing its

credibility with local clients. Locating away from mainstream Jobcentre Plus offices is an important consideration as they are often seen as threatening by potential customers. Many Action Teams located some distance from the Jobcentre Plus environment for this very reason, although some also maintained a part-time presence in Jobcentres to augment support provided to clients attending Jobcentre Plus services (Ecotec, 2002).

As well as highlighting the importance of locating in a non-threatening environment, the literature also emphasises that services must be geographically and physically accessible by the community that outreach is trying to serve. Yeandle and Pearson (2001) note that outreach was fundamental to the New Deal for Lone Parents Innovative pilots. Lone parents were attracted to the pilots in the first instance because they were located close to home. The importance of locating in local neighbourhood settings is also shown by the majority of Action Team clients who stated that they preferred to access the Action Team service in their neighbourhood rather than to travel to the jobcentre (Ecotec, 2002). On a slightly different note, the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) found that most disabled people had difficulty accessing goods and services, with almost one in ten taking part in a survey reporting that they had experienced problems trying to physically access an appointment at an advice organisation. The main difficulties mentioned were difficulties with steps at entrances to buildings, negotiating heavy doors, and a lack of lifts. Such physical barriers may act to deter disabled people (often a key target group) from using the service in the future, but may also influence usage by their friends and family (DRC, 2003).

An issue which came up in the literature and during the stakeholder and project manager interviews were the difficulties that were often incurred when trying to secure premises for outreach services. Watson and Tyers (1998), who examined 12 demonstration outreach projects designed to develop innovative ways of improving access to information and advice on learning opportunities, found that many projects experienced major difficulties in finding suitable premises, as the targeted communities generally had poor local facilities. For some projects, difficulties in securing premises resulted in a dilemma about whether to take services further from the community to find a suitable setting which was viewed to be counter-productive. A further issue is the length of time it can take to secure premises, and get them approved for health and safety purposes. Such considerations need to be taken into account when setting up satellite outreach services.

## 4 Providers of outreach services

This chapter looks at who provides outreach services, and particularly at the qualities and attributes of outreach staff and managers. In many respects, it appears to be the relationship between the outreach worker or adviser and the customer that can really make a difference to outcomes, and it is important to determine the skills of these individuals. The chapter also identifies key partners in relation to welfare-to-work outreach provision.

### 4.1 Outreach providers

Outreach services are provided by numerous organisations, depending on the type of service being provided and the main policy emphasis or 'field'. The interviews with stakeholders and project managers focused primarily on outreach providers or funders that were connected to the welfare-to-work agenda and thus, were undertaken with representatives of Jobcentre Plus, Employment Zones, Action Teams, Working Neighbourhoods Pilot (WNP) providers, local authorities, New Deal for Communities, charities, voluntary organisations and training providers.

An interesting point made by many (but not all) of the Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed for this study, and others who provided similar services to Jobcentre Plus but who were normally contracted-out from mainstream provision, eg Employment Zone and WNP providers, was the distance they placed between their outreach services and the Jobcentre Plus brand. Many respondents thought it was absolutely crucial **not** to use Jobcentre Plus livery, staff badges, etc. in order to build trust with non-traditional customer groups who were often suspicious of government organisations. This is not to say that customers were deliberately misled about the fact that Jobcentre Plus was funding or delivering the provision, but rather that this type of information was played down, and not deemed to be of any import, especially early on in the intervention. Essentially, customers have to be won over in the first instance and distancing outreach provision from statutory services was often seen as facilitating this. Having said this, a couple of interviewees said that the

fact they were Jobcentre Plus made no difference whatsoever to engaging customers: what was of greater importance were the skills of outreach workers to win customers over, the less formal environments in which outreach was being provided and the voluntary nature of the outreach service itself.

On reflection, it does not appear to be crucial that Jobcentre Plus, per se, delivers outreach services. However, what is important is that the delivery organisation is staffed and managed by people with the appropriate skills (see Section 4.2), the right 'product' knowledge, ie a clear understanding of welfare-to-work services, provision, benefits etc., good local labour market knowledge and a firm commitment to the aims of the outreach service, ie to get people into work.

What the literature indicates, and the interviews have confirmed, is that it is who provides outreach in terms of the delivery staff and managers, and their relationships with partners, that is crucial to success in engaging customers and moving them into work or bringing them into more (mainstream) provision.

## 4.2 Outreach staff

McGivney (2000) writes extensively about the staff attributes and skills required by outreach workers. It is most often the case that qualifications come way down the list of requirements; much more important is the ability to communicate, liaise and build relationships.

*'Those who take on the job of contacting people who historically do not take advantage of...opportunities are more likely to be accepted when they have backgrounds and characteristics similar to those of the groups targeted. People of the same gender and ethnic group, who speak the same language or have the same accent, and who have already established local credibility, are more likely to be trusted than those who do not have any characteristics in common with the communities contacted.'*

(pp68)

As McGivney (2000) points out, the tasks and challenges of the job illustrate the range of skills that will be required. In relation to the welfare-to-work agenda, and the emphasis on engaging (largely) non-traditional customers and groups, some of the skills required are:

- research skills to identify the customer target groups and target areas, and to identify existing networks and partners(hips) who share common interests;
- effective communication skills;
- the ability to build trust and relationships with partners, networks, referral and host organisations, etc. at strategic and operational levels;
- the ability to build trust and supportive relationships with the target groups and (potential) customers;

- the ability to work 'autonomously and sometimes in isolation';
- an enthusiasm and belief in what they are trying to achieve.

Frontline staff are seen as the key to successful outreach, and all stakeholders and project managers participating in the interviews said that they focus more on personalities when recruiting outreach staff than on formal qualifications or professional backgrounds. Similar personal qualities were described by stakeholders and project managers alike. Thus, outreach staff needed to:

- have a real 'passion' for the job;
- have an outgoing and 'bubbly' personality;
- be non-judgemental and empathetic and/or have some experience of the problems their target groups face;
- be non-judgemental and able to relate to target group circumstances;
- have a similar background to the people they are helping in terms of ethnicity, religion, age, etc., for example, have young advisers to work with young people;
- have knowledge of the local area:

*'A good outreach worker is someone who comes from the local community and therefore understands the issues people face.'*

(Project manager)

- be able to use their initiative;
- have good communication skills;
- have good organisational skills;
- be flexible and prepared to work out of normal office hours;
- have the confidence to approach people.

*'In general you have to be quite confident I think because you are constantly going out into situations and having to talk to people and approach people...even if you don't feel that confident you have to kind of project quite a confident front.'*

(Project manager)

Staff attitudes to the groups they are serving are of vital importance. The report by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) on disabled people's experiences of accessing services in Britain found that one in seven respondents felt that staff attitudes had caused them difficulties when accessing services, and especially for those with sensory impairments. Many survey respondents mentioned that they had been treated badly or ignored by staff members who did not know how to deal with them. They felt that staff in professions such as healthcare were more likely to 'treat you better' as they had a *'better understanding of disabilities, are more sympathetic*

*and are better trained*'. Many respondents said that positive staff attitudes towards disabled people would most influence them to continue to use a service which is a key learning point for any organisation.

The literature also discusses the importance of having staff and volunteers recruited from the communities that outreach serves. Barnes *et al.* (2005) describes how outreach workers in the Ethnic Minority Outreach (EMO) pilots were recruited from within 'hard-to-reach' communities, and had a knowledge of the employment issues faced by the communities, spoke community languages, worked in ways which respected cultural sensitivities, and were committed to the job. This was the key to success in the EMO pilots. The Barnard study (2003) found that people from ethnic minorities felt that organisations with staff who have either a similar ethnic background, language skills or the 'right attitude' were trustworthy and vital in helping them access services. The study also found that staff from local authorities and voluntary and community sector organisations also thought that the gender, language skills, attitude and ethnic background of outreach workers were very important, especially for ethnic minorities.

Importantly, during the stakeholder and project manager interviews, many reported that if staff did not want to do outreach work, that was usually a good indication of whether someone would be able to do it. Enthusiasm and commitment were often key determinants of ability in outreach work.

Strong and effective management skills are also of paramount importance in delivering outreach services. Ecotec (2002) found that management capacity was crucial in initiatives involving a high degree of planning and development work, networking and partnership working, all of which are required when establishing and maintaining an outreach service. The ability to prioritise and respond to changing circumstances and to solve problems and issues as they arise are particularly important attributes of outreach managers (Renewal.net). Squirrell (2001) argues that the motivation and vision of the co-ordinator or manager is vital to ensure clarity in the purpose of the project, and the communication of clear aims to staff who deliver the project. Effective communication skills are crucial too, as staff have to be managed remotely: regular communication is required if staff are to be kept up to date with progress, issues, etc. One project manager commented on how different forms of communication were important: sometimes text messages were more effective than emails which may not be received on time if staff are working away from their base. All these issues point to the need for managers (and staff) to be flexible in their approach and their actions.

### 4.3 Partnerships

Section 3.2.2 discussed how outreach services are often provided within other organisational settings (the peripatetic model), for example, via sessional outreach in community centres or libraries, etc. Cross-referrals are also common in outreach provision, thus, a housing association may refer a customer to an Action Team or

another jobbroking (outreach) service, or an outreach provider may refer customers to an employment training provider or a specialist counselling team. These examples illustrate how working with partners is a key feature of an outreach service: referrals in and referrals out. Moreover, outreach services are usually targeted at particular communities or particular groups of people and there is a need for outreach providers and staff to understand the areas in which they work, requiring them to network with other key local players and agencies. Indeed, one of the defining features of 'outreach' (see Section 2.2) is the *'networking process, whereby service providers work in partnership with other local stakeholders to promote and deliver (welfare-to-work) services to people in local communities'*.

Partnership working is highlighted in the literature as an important aspect of successful outreach, and a number of authors stress the need for effective partnerships. Barnard *et al.* (2003) found that outreach strategies were believed to be most effective when they were developed in partnership between the government department, the local authority and the voluntary and community sector (who are seen as providing crucial services to the local community). McGivney (2002) also argues that negotiating with community leaders and other gatekeepers is one of the most important aspects of outreach, as the success of any outreach initiative depends on their co-operation, commitment and support. Cliff (2000) describes how the partnership between local agencies funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) was working well in the project to help refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to find work and improve their employability skills. Partners of the outreach centre included local colleges and adult education centres, a university, the (then) Employment Service, Careers Service, and (then) Training and Enterprise Council.

Yeandle and Pearson (2001) found that good management of partnership arrangements was vital to the successful delivery of the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) Innovative pilots. This worked best when organisations had time to establish good relationships, devised well-planned working structures, and clearly defined roles for each partner agency. Without this good planning, partnerships were found to be time consuming, with some tasks 'slipping through the cracks'.

Evidence from the interviews with stakeholders and project managers showed that most outreach providers were working in partnership with other organisations, for example, the local voluntary sector, schools/colleges, specialist organisations dealing with issues such as drug and substance abuse, ex-offenders, and youth people etc. Other partners often included:

- local charities;
- the Connexions service;
- local training providers;
- local housing providers and associations;
- local councils, and particularly Local Strategic Partnerships, and Neighbourhood Renewal teams.

Most of the (external) outreach teams also had working links with their local Jobcentre Plus offices and received vacancies to advertise in their outreach facility. They might also use Jobcentre Plus facilities on a sessional basis, for example, some projects used a desk in the local Jobcentre Plus offices regularly to engage clients, although it was important that the desk was clearly labelled about who they were, ie not Jobcentre Plus, as they did not want to put potential customers off. Customer referrals may also come directly from Jobcentre Plus to outreach providers (external providers and also Jobcentre Plus-run outreach provision).

Stakeholders and project managers saw the main benefits of partnership working as:

- sharing premises and, therefore, reducing costs;
- sharing health and safety concerns and issues, eg about personal/adviser security;
- making and receiving cross-referrals;
- contributing towards and benefiting from joint funding for (ad hoc) projects and events; and
- providing a joined-up service for the area.

## 5 An assessment of outreach

This chapter takes a broader view of outreach services, in their various forms and modes of delivery, and identifies the factors that are most likely to lead to successful outreach, and conversely, the factors or constraints that can act to make outreach services less successful. As part of this, the chapter begins with a discussion of the outcomes from outreach activities, which are the most obvious way of measuring the success (or otherwise) of this type of intervention.

### 5.1 Outcomes from outreach

There appears to be unequivocal agreement that measuring the outcomes from outreach services is not straightforward: looking simply at job and qualification outcomes to judge performance is often an inadequate and only partial indication of success. Moreover, collating data from outreach services, for example, across Jobcentre Plus districts, to arrive at aggregate measures of outreach provision is highly problematic, not least because of different delivery structures and methods (if they exist at all) and the possible emphasis on different target groups. Outreach services are often peripheral and targeted activities, designed to reflect local circumstances and do not conform to national delivery structures and, thus, like is not being compared to like. While individual outreach projects may measure and be judged and funded according to job (and qualification) outcomes, it is much more difficult to arrive at any understanding of the broader or aggregate impact of outreach services overall.

Stakeholders, and particularly project managers, stressed how long it can take to engage customers and the key target groups by virtue of the fact that they are so hard to reach. Mainstream welfare-to-work services (ie Jobcentre Plus) have been largely unable to attract these customer groups and outreach services often have to take very small steps to build trust and relationships with their target audience. Thus, any outcomes from welfare-to-work outreach services do not come quickly.

*'Outreach needs to be in situ for one to two years to become part of the community and trusted.'*

(Project manager)

There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that once an outreach service has become embedded in local communities there is a snowball effect. Word-of-mouth is a powerful marketing tool and customers often self-refer to outreach services on the personal recommendation of friends and family. Some project managers reported that, after 12–18 months of operation, they were now achieving excellent results with customers who were very hard to reach and help. However, having taken time to engage customers in the outreach service, the help they (subsequently) needed to move into work or other positive outcomes, such as training, was also long-term and resource intensive.

McGivney (2002) argues that it can be very difficult to measure the effectiveness of outreach in terms of quantitative (hard) outcomes for a number of reasons:

- outreach activities are often conducted with hard-to-reach groups who may need time to develop trust and confidence before engaging in mainstream services;
- outreach activities are often innovative and experimental and outcomes may not be evident for some time.

Not surprisingly, very little literature was found on the effectiveness of outreach per se, nor any recent and robust data showing outcomes from it. In terms of hard (job) outcomes from welfare-to-work outreach services, the only published data available on Action Teams (Ecotec, 2002) reported that between July 2000 and the end of September 2001, 40 per cent of all customers who had used Action Team services had gone on to secure work. Most of these clients were male, likely to have been unemployed for less than six months and were from younger age groups, ie 18 to 24 years old. Thus, it would seem that those most likely to be helped in the early stages of the Action Team service were people who were relatively easier to help. What this research was unable to do was to present the counterfactual and calculate how many of these job outcomes were deadweight, ie would have happened anyway, and how many were additional and due to the Action Team intervention itself. This data is now out-of-date and Action Teams are much more likely to be achieving greater outcomes as they have become more established. Anecdotally at least, many project managers (including Action Team managers) reported during the interviews for this research that they were overachieving on job outcomes against their set targets.

Of course, outreach activities can also lead to softer outcomes (Dewson *et al.*, 2000) and while most stakeholders and project managers taking part in the interviews have hard targets to achieve, usually relating to job and training outcomes, all stressed the importance of softer outcomes, such as increased self-confidence and motivation. Once customers had engaged with outreach services, they made many gains in relation to soft and usually, intangible, outcomes. However, few stakeholders or project managers mentioned any systems to collect information or monitoring data to gauge soft outcomes or distance travelled amongst the customer target groups. These are difficult outcomes to monitor and measure in any quantitative

way, particularly if projects receive no funding to achieve these types of outcomes or indeed to track and measure them. Having said this, this type of information can be invaluable to show customers how far they have come, and importantly, to show funders what results they are achieving with very hard to help client groups.

Another outcome from outreach services that is often underplayed is the role it has on effective partnership working in local communities. During the interviews with stakeholders and project managers, many reported that outreach offered a way to work in much greater partnership with local services and agencies, and to raise the profile of their services and organisations more generally. In the case of Jobcentre Plus, one project manager stated that they were able *'to put something on the table'* in relation to local regeneration which improved relationships with other local stakeholders significantly.

## 5.2 Effective outreach

This section, rather than providing hard evidence of successful outreach (which, as discussed above, is difficult to do) points instead to other ways in which outreach might be deemed to be successful or effective. Essentially, this section provides examples of why welfare-to-work outreach services are, or at the very least have the potential be, effective in achieving their primary aim: to engage (new) customers in welfare-to-work provision. In many ways, the discussion here serves to reiterate the rationales for using outreach as a means to engage and deliver services.

### 5.2.1 Engaging hard-to-reach customers

Outreach has been shown to be effective in attracting clients not readily accessible to mainstream provision. Yeandle and Pearson (2001) report that outreach was a successful way of attracting lone parents to the Innovative Pilots, and was very effective in caseloading lone parents on to New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP):

*'The evaluation highlighted the importance of outreach and community based delivery as mechanisms for attracting 'hard to reach' clients. IPs were most successful in caseloading lone parents to NDLP when PAs engaged in outreach work.'*

(p5)

### 5.2.2 Overcoming negative perceptions

Although the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach service was not found to provide an effective solution for engaging with large numbers of target customers, it was effective (amongst those it did reach) in tackling negative preconceptions about the Jobcentre, providing information around support available to enter work and increasing the confidence and motivation of participants:

*'Not being the Jobcentre was significant in their initial engagement with the outreach service. The support of their outreach provider was vital in overcoming their often negative preconceptions of the Jobcentre.'*

(p.vi)

The (perceived) distance between mainstream welfare-to-work services, ie Jobcentre Plus, and outreach services is clearly seen as important by many providers, and is often argued to be one of the reasons why outreach is effective in engaging hard-to-reach groups. However, it may also be the geographical closeness of the outreach service itself and the staff, who are able to respond much more flexibly to customers' needs outwith of the requirements of mandatory programmes, that makes the service much more attractive to customers.

### **5.2.3 Flexibility and 'friendliness'**

A study that modelled the performance of welfare-to-work programmes in the US (Bloom *et al.*, 2001) found that a clear staff focus on providing personalised attention to the needs, desires, abilities and limitations of their clients can markedly increase programme success. It found that programmes that emphasise personalised client attention are more successful than those that do not. The 'one size does not fit all', and 'getting close to the customer' emphasis of outreach services, is very important and is likely to bring about successful outcomes, albeit in the medium- to longer-term.

The value of informal and flexible outreach provision was also highlighted in the evaluation of Action Teams (ECOTEC, 2002). Clients valued this informality and found services much more approachable and accessible as a result. Stakeholders and project managers also thought that continuity of service was important. Outreach advisers have smaller caseloads (because they have lower targets) and are able to work with individuals over a period of time to build trust and really address and overcome barriers to employment. Moreover, this is done in informal, friendly, local environments without the threat of benefit sanctions. These features of outreach services are perceived to be crucial to their success.

Watson and Tyers' research (1998), examining the 12 outreach demonstration projects in the field of learning found that:

- a friendly and informal approach worked best. Unhurried introductions to the learning process, staff, venues and other participants bore dividends in the long run;
- ownership amongst local people and organisations was crucial, and ideally, they were fully involved at every stage;
- 'rough and ready' services locally delivered by local people were more effective at breaking down barriers than encouraging people to travel to mainstream services.

### 5.3 Constraints on effective outreach

Importantly, this study has also looked at the factors that can inhibit successful or effective outreach. Not surprisingly, many of these factors are the converse of what makes for effective outreach provision. The literature and the interviews with stakeholders and project managers raised a number of issues that can act as constraints to the effective delivery of services through outreach including:

- a lack of clear goals at the outset;
- a lack of support from mainstream organisations;
- problems faced by community organisations in delivering outreach services (such as lack of funding, being too small to provide a full range of services, inexperience of working with mainstream organisations and structures, and a lack of local labour market information);
- outcome pressures leading to 'creaming' as easier-to-help clients are prioritised;
- restrictive customer target groups;
- conflicts arising from the multiple use of venues; and
- a range of challenges faced by outreach workers.

These issues are discussed in turn in the following sections.

#### 5.3.1 Lack of clear goals

Squirrell (2001) argues the need to set clear and realistic project outcomes, clear marketing and selection criteria and a clear focus for provision at the outset. All of the three homeless pilot projects evaluated by Squirrell floundered on one or more of these areas and consequently, faced major problems. One project had difficulties with defining what was to be delivered to the customer group and in determining how it differed from other offers to homeless clients. The lesson here was to ensure that services complemented other local provision and do not (unnecessarily) duplicate it. This lack of 'specialism' led to problems in recruiting customers who had range of other projects to chose from. Another project was open to all customers without clear selection criteria which made it hard for the project to realise its goals.

#### 5.3.2 Lack of support

A lack of effective support from the mainstream organisation can also be a problem and this can manifest itself in many ways. Again, Squirrell (2001) found that resources and accommodation provided by the host organisation were sometimes insufficient or unsuitable. Projects had problems with: too few staff; poor physical resources (such as insufficient or unsuitable accommodation), and problems with developing strategies for assessment and client tracking. Projects needed to be able to respond to these issues as they arose but were unable to as they were bound into their parent organisation. Squirrell argues that the mainstream organisation needs

to be responsive to the flexible and 'immediate response' nature of outreach projects, and also to recognise the importance of staffing and resourcing such projects adequately and appropriately.

Stakeholders and project managers raised concerns about the time and resources available for implementing outreach services. Setting up outreach services had proved to be time consuming and labour intensive and demanded a lot of preparatory work to build relationships, gain trust and become embedded in the local community before hard outcomes were achieved. Funding organisations needed to be mindful of this as any 'shortcuts' at this stage could have a detrimental effect on outcomes from the outreach service in the longer-term.

Problems with information technology (IT) had also been experienced by some Jobcentre Plus outreach provision, in particular slow connections to the internet and Labour Market System (LMS), which had impacted on the quality of service they could offer customers:

*'People don't want to have to wait around, they want to come in, be told about a job and how to apply and then leave, they don't want to have to wait around... We have lost customers at the outreach site because of the delay in downloading job vacancies they are interested in.'*

(Project Manager)

This example illustrates how mainstream organisations need to work with outreach services to minimise disruption to service provision. Some element of risk assessment and response planning is advisable.

### **5.3.3 Community and voluntary organisations**

Community organisations faced a range of constraints when delivering outreach services which have broader relevance to the welfare-to-work agenda. An important issue highlighted in Barnard *et al.* (2003) concerned the capacity of community and voluntary organisations to manage and deliver services, and funding. The voluntary sector is often crucial to providing outreach services, not least as a referral mechanism, however, these organisations often felt they were restricted by resource issues such as low levels of funding, staffing and inadequate (staff) training. On a related note, the Jobs for All report (1999) found that the relationship between outreach workers and customers was a resource-intensive one: customers needed ongoing support, they were often referred to different agencies to overcome barriers to work, and each time they moved to a new source of help their chances of dropping out from the 'system' were increased. This is difficult for small (voluntary or community) organisations to address as they may not be able to provide the full range of help needed. As a result, they need to have effective mechanisms to refer people on to other agencies when further help is needed.

Barnes *et al.* (2005) describe how voluntary sector community organisations who were working with Jobcentre Plus for the first time attracted many new client groups, including those widely recognised as under-utilising Jobcentre Plus services.

However, it meant that the community organisations had a degree of inexperience and, therefore, a need for additional support from Jobcentre Plus. The Jobs for All report (1999) found that it is very important for organisations providing outreach services to have access to high quality labour market advice in order to understand the local economy better and thus, make better customer referrals to jobs. Research on the New Deal Gateway in Birmingham by Atkinson (cited in the Jobs for All report, 1999) found that extensive use was made of community organisations delivering the Gateway, but that this service was less effective than it could have been, because many of the community organisations were not adequately linked into local labour market intelligence and, therefore, had poor knowledge of local job opportunities, education and training. This point illustrates how important it is for outreach services to be networked with other agencies, and to share expertise and knowledge.

#### **5.3.4 Outcome pressures**

Outcome pressures can also act as a constraint to the effective delivery of outreach, and can, in some cases, lead to 'creaming' as easier-to-help clients are prioritised to achieve outcome targets. Barnes *et al.* (2005), in their evaluation of the ethnic minority outreach pilot, describe how providers understood that the pilot was geared towards those furthest from the labour market. However, the nature of the outcome measures created some disincentives to working with the most challenging groups and meant that most projects were unable to finance their work with the hardest-to-help. As a result, many providers concentrated on participants who would generate the necessary outcomes and who tended to be closer to the labour market. The pressure on providers to obtain rapid employment outcomes also detracted from the 'hard-to-reach' focus as those clients who were 'hard-to-reach' could take two or three years to move into employment. Research by Gray (2000) also found that the output-related funding system led to creaming, and encouraged curtailment of skills training in order to secure an immediate job. Gray argues that providers should be paid in relation to actual staff costs and time spent rather than per positive outcome, as this gives them more encouragement to deliver a quality service to clients. Stakeholders and project managers also thought that restricted funding and funding that was largely tied to outcomes encouraged 'creaming'. One project manager reported that due to limited funds and hard targets they sometimes have to be slightly exclusive:

*'because we have to pick the right people.'*

(Project manager)

Squirrell (2001) found that the pressure pilots felt to deliver their target numbers meant that many skipped lead-in tasks (initial development work) and tried to undertake several of these (ie planning/developing policies and partnership working, etc.) at an interim stage. She concludes that:

*'mechanisms for calculating success, in terms of something other than throughputs, demands further consideration.'*

(p40)

This point was made repeatedly during the interviews with project managers who pressed for the broader range of outcomes from outreach services to be considered, or at the very least recognised as important steps and measures of distance travelled, eg improving health and nutrition amongst target populations, or the acquisition of softer skills such as improvements to attitude or confidence.

### **5.3.5 Target groups**

In addition to outcome pressures, target groups set by funders can also be too restrictive. A major constraint to the success of the outreach project examined by Mitchell *et al.* (2002) was the age limit of 25 set by the funding organisation. Project workers and providers felt that those aged over 25 were more likely to be committed and ready to engage with the service, and were disappointed that they could not refer this age group onto the project. This points to the need for outreach services to be responsive to the needs of all potential customers, if there is evidence of clear demand.

### **5.3.6 Venues**

Some outreach projects in the field of adult education have experienced problems or constraints arising from multiple use of premises, with a lack of co-operation and rivalries between different services using the same venues being a common situation (McGivney 2002). Some of the constraints mentioned by stakeholders and project managers often pointed to poor working relationships with other community organisations, stakeholders and partners. Some examples included:

- other organisations charging providers to use their facilities for outreach purposes (eg GPs and colleges);
- a poor understanding and awareness by other organisations of the aims of the outreach project; and
- competition amongst partner organisations for scarce resources.

These examples illustrate the importance of working effectively with partners to share expertise and knowledge and highlight what can happen when these relationships break down or are not established in the early implementation stages.

### **5.3.7 Outreach staff**

McGivney (2002) also cites how outreach workers may also face a number of challenges to their work that can act to constrain effectiveness. These include:

- lack of institutional support;
- combating community resistance and distrust;

- being fair (and being seen to be fair) in the allocation of resources and dealings with different groups even when they have conflicting views and needs;
- the need to avoid becoming overly associated with a particular group, as this can lead to rejection by others;
- working with inflexible funding regimes;
- isolation and working entirely on one's own;
- insufficient recognition, by managers and funders, of how much time it takes before results can be seen;
- persuading managers to recognise outcomes other than increased recruitment (or jobs);
- conflicts if institutional values are not compatible with those of the target communities. Preconceived ideas about what people want or need can be deeply resented.

The constraints highlighted above show how challenging outreach can be, and how many issues need to be considered in order to deliver effective outreach.



## 6 Conclusions

This report set out to review the existing literature on, and identify projects and pilots that have used, outreach in client engagement. The aim was to identify the key factors of effective outreach provision, and importantly, to identify the factors that can inhibit effective outreach.

In the first instance, it was important to check definitions of outreach to arrive at one that was fit for purpose for this study. In so doing, the research determined that outreach provision included (welfare-to-work) services that are taken out of their normative, institutional settings, ie mainstream Jobcentre Plus offices, and are delivered much closer to customers in their local environments and communities. Thus, services may include activities that are intended to: market services and recruit people to provision; to deliver welfare-to-work services in the community; and crucially, to network and deliver services in partnership with other local agencies and stakeholders. What seems to differentiate outreach provision from the mainstream though, is:

- the emphasis on hard-to-reach (and by definition hard-to-help) customers, and targeted customer groups, who do not normally make use of Jobcentre Plus services;
- the voluntary nature of participation in outreach services;
- the provision of an holistic service, possibly linked to activities and services provided by local partners, including one-to-one support and help from a key worker or personal adviser to overcome barriers to work.

This research has focused primarily on outreach services that are linked to the welfare-to-work agenda in order to identify key lessons for policy makers.

What became clear early on in the research was that outreach services were patchy and adhoc – they seemed to exist in some areas but not in others, and were often a response to a particular need to engage specific groups of customers. Moreover, outreach services were largely peripheral to other mainstream welfare-to-work activities, and arguably then, vulnerable to cuts in resources or shifting priorities. The very nature of outreach provision that aims to engage non-traditional customers

requires services to be in place for relatively long periods of time before results are achieved which can make judging the effectiveness of outreach services particularly challenging. There are no quick wins with outreach and this needs to be borne in mind when assessing the worth (and funding) of outreach services per se. There is certainly no aggregate hard data on the performance of outreach services and so any attempt to evaluate their effectiveness in terms of job entry rates or other hard outcomes at an overall level, is impossible. Projects reported significant levels of job entries but no data exist nationally to support these assertions.

There is, however, a significant amount of soft and anecdotal evidence for the effectiveness of outreach services. The literature review provided examples of where outreach services had drawn in non-traditional and very hard-to-help customers to welfare-to-work style provision. The interviews with project managers and stakeholders also supported outreach as an engagement mechanism and there is a widespread call for other, softer outcomes from outreach services to be acknowledged by the centre, in addition to the more usual job and qualification measures.

A key point to note is that outreach services are not, and do not, always have to be delivered by Jobcentre Plus. In many cases, this distancing of outreach provision from Jobcentre Plus is seen to be crucial to the success of the provision. There is evidence to suggest that outreach services that are provided by another organisation, or by Jobcentre Plus but under a different guise, are able to overcome negative perceptions of statutory services and encourage greater participation by non-traditional customer groups. Having said this, the evidence for this is not conclusive and some providers emphasise that it is the friendly and flexible nature of outreach provision, the lack of mandation or sanctions, and the local or community delivery mechanisms that engage customers: it is not the delivery organisation but the skills of the staff and the content and quality of the service itself that determine participation. What seems more important is the way outreach staff relate to, and work with, customers that makes the difference. Some providers tried distancing themselves from Jobcentre Plus in the first instance but found that it made no difference to customer engagement: they now wear Jobcentre Plus badges and continue to work as well with local customers as before.

What also seems crucial to successful outreach, in the context of this research, is the need to maintain the focus on moving people into work. One of the learning points coming from the study is the need to be clear about what the service is aiming to achieve, from the very word go, and then to be guided by this throughout. Outreach staff then need to be able to deliver this aim, ie they must have the skillset to work with harder-to-reach customers and must also possess the 'product knowledge', eg of the local labour market, in-work benefits etc. to assist people back in to work.

Outreach is also useful for building and maintaining relationships with other local agencies and stakeholders which is inkeeping with increasing policy shifts towards more joined-up, community and local level services, eg Building on New Deal, Neighbourhood Renewal, Local Strategic Partnerships, etc. Having said this, the push in Jobcentre Plus towards bigger, rolled-out offices might be perceived to be

going against this tide and outreach provision may provide some sort of solution. Outreach offers Jobcentre Plus the possibility of maintaining a local presence and continuing to engage in partnerships on the ground.

As non-traditional customer groups start to engage with Jobcentre Plus services more routinely, for example, through the work-focused interview regime, it is arguable that they will not need outreach services to draw 'them in' to mainstream organisations. This is true to the extent that they will have regular contact with Jobcentre Plus, however, it does not follow that they will necessarily take up mainstream services and provision. It remains to be seen if there is still a place for the more informal and flexible approach offered locally by outreach services to engage customers, their partners and other groups who are not part of the benefit system at all. Outreach can offer a constant presence in local communities and maintain the profile of the 'work is possible' message: such a presence, over time, may attract more of the hardest-to-reach and hardest-to-help and bring them closer to welfare-to-work service provision and employment. There is a need to understand more fully, and more systematically, who does make use of outreach services and what their outcomes from it are, at an aggregate level. These data may then be compared with mainstream services to arrive at an assessment of the added (or complementary) value of outreach services.



# Appendix

## Examples of projects featuring outreach

### Project 1

**Provider:** Not for profit organisation

**Funded by:** ESF/Regeneration/ALG/LSC

**Region:** London

A project run in a particular ward in London aims to address training gaps for people who would normally be put off training because of poor school experiences. The project targets ethnic minority groups (especially Bengali and Somali groups), young people, gang members and those with chaotic lifestyles.

It provides basic skills training, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Information Technology (IT) training, literacy and numeracy capacity building, preparation for E2E and *Learndirect* courses, and works in collaboration with partners in the area and also with local community groups.

The project is based in a single site location in the local community with an on-site crèche. It aims to 'service' 100 people which includes giving advice and does not necessarily include the number of people engaged in training.

The project has undertaken many different marketing activities to reach their target groups, but has found that personal contact between potential customers and outreach staff has been the most successful (eg fun-days in the local park, stalls and displays in local venues, etc.). Other activities such as leaflet dropping and advertising have not been as successful in attracting customers.

The project feels it is successful because: it works closely with local community groups and key partners; it is distanced from mainstream services and therefore 'officialdom', and has staff that are friendly, always accessible and from a similar target group to their clients (eg they have a young person on their help desk which encourages other young people to use their services).

## Project 2

**Provider:** ESF Project

**Funded by:** ESF

**Region:** London

One project that aims to help women get into Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) (either work related or higher education courses) offers IT and office skills courses, language courses and motivational/confidence building courses. Their main target groups are women with little or no qualifications and particularly those from hard-to-reach ethnic minority groups (such as Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali groups). These women face many work-related barriers (eg religious, family and cultural), which may hinder their access to this type of provision.

The project also aims to provide information about, and signposting of, other services available in the area and runs IT and language courses at the local college or community centres. Project staff also help with job search activities. Services are provided through detached outreach, ie door knocking, visiting Mosques, community centres and shops, and giving out leaflets to advertise the project and the courses on offer. People showing interest are then invited to see an outreach worker for a one-to-one appointment.

The project has a number of targets based on the number of people obtaining qualifications or certain levels of education, and the number of people helped back into work. The project finds the targets hard to reach as many of the target groups have a long way to travel (ie they have language or confidence issues) before they can go back into education or work. Staff therefore highlight the importance of taking into account softer skills achieved, such as increased confidence/motivation, etc.

Outreach works well because of the dedicated and flexible members of staff who have similar backgrounds to the target groups (including speaking the same language) and, therefore, have some understanding of the issues they face. The main constraint has been around funding as it has been limited and inflexible. The project has also had problems with the funding organisation with regards to restrictions placed on their target groups. The project initially wanted to target both men and women but the funding organisation insisted on women only.

### Project 3

**Provider:** Voluntary organisation

**Funded by:** ESF/LA/Childrens Fund/Lottery

**Region:** London

This project is run by a voluntary organisation and offers support to families with disabled children within a defined geographical area. The project offers after-school clubs, holiday play schemes, drop-in advice sessions, support groups and respite care, as well as more career-orientated support such as: careers advice, job search activities and job placements with other voluntary organisations.

Services are delivered from a fixed and separate location within the local targeted community which is easily accessible and open during normal office hours each day. Staff find that the location works well but they would like bigger premises.

The project has achieved its targets and puts this down to the outreach staff. The staff are enthusiastic about their job, have similar backgrounds to the target groups (ie they come from similar ethnic minority backgrounds or have disabled children themselves) and can, therefore, empathise with the problems these groups face.

Funding has been a particular problem for this project as there is some uncertainty as to whether the project will have enough funding to continue. This has had an impact on staff in terms of job security and on partner organisations in terms of continued joint funding.

### Project 4

**Provider:** Jobcentre Plus

**Funded by:** Jobcentre Plus and Local Authority

**Region:** North West England

This project aims to provide work-focused assistance to inactive, long-term benefit customers, eg Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income Support (IS) customers, but also to local residents who do not claim benefits but who are still inactive. The provision is entirely voluntary and draws on, and refers to, mainstream Jobcentre Plus provision. Outreach advisers work with local residents on a one-to-one basis to get them ready to take up training or employment. The approach is long-term and is a lot less pressured than the Jobcentre Plus regime: advisers do not have stringent job entry targets to achieve and so have time to spend getting to know local residents and overcoming any suspicion they have of official services.

The project manager feels it is difficult to generalise about the most effective outreach and engagement mechanisms. These may change according to local

circumstances or customer groups. For example, when working with customers from minority ethnic groups, there is a need to pay attention to cultural differences. Outreach staff need to work with different groups to understand and fit in with different cultures and to build trust in a non-threatening way. The project has tried many different engagement mechanisms including peripatetic outreach in GP centres, libraries, health centres, and alcohol and drug drop-in centres, and voluntary organisation premises. It has also run a stall in the local market advertising the project. The project has a high street 'shop' from which it provides most services. The location of the shop is regarded as paramount for unsolicited business – people just call in. The project is not branded as Jobcentre Plus and staff do not wear the Jobcentre Plus livery, badges, etc. The project actually gets a lot of its referrals from mainstream Jobcentre Plus offices themselves.

One of the real benefits of the outreach provision is that it has facilitated greater partnership working, and cross-referrals, with other local voluntary and community organisations.

The project receives similar levels of funding as Action Teams and has a job entry target of 1,600 over two years. Over 2,200 customers have received, or are receiving, help from the project to date and job entry rates are relatively high (eg over 70 job entries per month over summer 2005). The project is seeing some very real successes with a very hard-to-help customer group. Over 60 per cent of people moving into work are aged 35 or more, and some 39 per cent have experienced mental health problems.

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